

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 17566 01 OF 02 141556Z

46

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

OMB-01 SAJ-01 AID-05 CEA-01 COME-00 FRB-03 CIEP-01

STR-04 TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 SAM-01 FEAE-00 INT-05

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6551

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION BERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 17566

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: EEC

SUBJECT: UK CAUTIOUS ON DIRECT ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT

SUMMARY: BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS EMPHASIZED THAT IT SEES
LITTLE CHANCE THAT TARGET DATE OF MAY 1978 FOR DIRECT E-
LECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL BE ACHIEVED.
WORKING LEVEL IN FCO BELIEVES 1980 MORE REALISTIC TARGET
DATE, AND THAT THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL PROCEDURES WOULD
PROBABLY BE IN EFFECT FOR DECADE AFTER FIRST DIRECT ELEC-
TION. WILSON GOVERNMENT SEES EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AS IN-
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PAGE 02 LONDON 17566 01 OF 02 141556Z

STITUTION WITH LITTLE AUTHORITY AND THEY ARE NOT YET CON-
VINCED THEY WISH TO GIVE IT MORE -- ESPECIALLY SINCE PAS-

SING OF WESTMINSTER POWER TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL RAISE PROFOUND CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION OF EFFECT OF THAT SHIFT OF AUTHORITY ON THE PRIMACY OF PARLIAMENT. PEOPLE OF BRITAIN AND THEIR PRESENT LEADERS ARE NOT READY IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO GIVE UP ANY ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE NAME OF EUROPEAN UNITY. AT DECEMBER 1-2 EUROPEAN COUNCIL MEETING IN ROME, WILSON, EMBASSY BELIEVES, WILL EMPHASIZE BRITAIN'S COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO DIRECT ELECTIONS, BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OBVIOUS NEED FOR A LONG AND DELIBERATE PROCESS OF PUBLIC DEBATE BEFORE THOSE ELECTIONS GO FORWARD. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS EMPHASIZED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS THAT IT SEES LITTLE CHANCE THAT THE ORIGINAL COMMUNITY TARGET DATE OF MAY 1978 FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL BE ACHIEVED. MOST RECENTLY, FONSEC CALLAGHAN STATED IN PARLIAMENT NOVEMBER 10 THAT ALTHOUGH BRITAIN HAD A TREATY COMMITMENT ON THIS MATTER, AND WOULD HONOR IT, THERE WERE MANY COMPLICATED ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE LEFT TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO SETTLE. THESE INCLUDED THE PREPARATION OF AN ELECTORAL ROLL, THE DECISION ON WHO WAS ENTITLED TO VOTE, THE METHOD OF ELECTION, WHO HAD THE RIGHT TO BE A CANDIDATE, WHETHER THERE SHOULD BE A DUAL MANDATE, THE QUESTION OF CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES, AND THE MANNER OF FINANCING THE ELECTION. CALLAGHAN CONCLUDED THAT ALL THESE WERE "INTRICATE" MATTERS AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO WORK OUT, THAT HE WAS NOT "OVER OPTIMISTIC" WITH REGARD TO THE 1978 TARGET DATE, AND THAT HE TOOK A "SLIGHTLY LESS ROSY VIEW" THAN SOME OF HIS EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES ON THE ISSUE.

2. FCO SOURCES ARE, IF ANYTHING, EVEN MORE BEARISH THAN THESE PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY THE FONSEC, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING THE 1978 DATE. JULIET COLLINGS, WORKING LEVEL OFFICIAL IN FCO WHO FOLLOWS EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, TOLD US THIS WEEK THAT IN HER VIEW THERE WAS VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE THAT THE FIRST DIRECT ELECTION WOULD BE HELD IN 1978. THIS
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PAGE 03 LONDON 17566 01 OF 02 141556Z

WAS SIMPLY "WISHFUL THINKING" ON THE PART OF SOME EC MEMBERS. IN ECHOING THE FONSEC'S PARLIAMENTARY GLOOMY LITANY, SHE ASSERTED THAT 1980 WAS A MUCH MORE REALISTIC TARGET DATE FOR THE COMMUNITY TO AIM AT. DIRECT ELECTIONS WERE, SHE SAID, A "PANDORA'S BOX FULL OF UNKNOWN HORRORS." IT WAS THUS DOUBLY IMPORTANT FOR THE NINE TO PROCEED WITH GREAT CARE, AND IN ANY EVENT BRITAIN WOULD NOT BE PUSHED BY ITS PARTNERS ON A MATTER OF SUCH IMPORTANCE. SHE ADDED MATTER-OF-FACTLY, PUSHING UK CONCERNS TO THEIR OUTER LIMIT, THAT IT WAS CRITICAL FOR THE COMMU-

NITY TO TAKE CARE IN CREATING PROCEDURES FOR THE FIRST
DIRECT ELECTION SINCE THOSE INITIAL NATIONAL PROCEDURES
WOULD PROBABLY BE IN EFFECT FOR "A DECADE OR SO." PER-
HAPS AT THAT TIME, I.E. 1990, THE COMMUNITY WOULD BE
READY TO IMPLEMENT THE TREATY OF ROME PROVISION THAT
ELECTORAL RULES FOR ELECTION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
SHOULD BE UNIFORM IN ALL MEMBER STATES.

3. THIS PERSPECTIVE WAS REPEATED TO US NOVEMBER 12 BY
TOM MCNALLY, POLITICAL ADVISER TO THE FONSEC. ACCORDING

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PAGE 01 LONDON 17566 02 OF 02 141535Z

46

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 17566

TO MCNALLY, THE UK WISHED TO PERSUADE FELLOW EC MEMBERS TO ABANDON THEIR RHETORICAL CLOUD AND FACE NOW THE SPECIFIC AND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS WHICH SURROUND THE ISSUE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS. BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN ADDITION WOULD CONSULT WITH OPPOSITION PARTIES BEFORE AGREEING TO GO AHEAD, AND THOSE DISCUSSIONS COULD BE DIFFICULT AND THUS DRAWN OUT. BRITISH WERE NOT ODD MAN OUT OF EC, MCNALLY CONCLUDED. RATHER, THEY WERE PROVIDING, ALONG WITH DANES, USEFUL CORRECTIVE TO THOSE WHO WOULD RUN BEFORE THEY COULD WALK.

4. MCNALLY DID NOT ADD ONE OBVIOUS POINT. THE LIBERAL
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PAGE 02 LONDON 17566 02 OF 02 141535Z

PARTY WILL USE THOSE DISCUSSIONS TO PUSH THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HARD FOR A UK ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR THE FIRST DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. THIS IS A HOBBY HORSE THE LIBERALS ARE ROCKING HARD HERE THESE DAYS, HOPING IT WILL LEAD TO ELECTORAL REFORM OF THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM. THIS SAME CAUSALITY IS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL REASONS WHY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, WHICH UNLIKE THE LIBERALS WINS ELECTIONS UNDER THE PRESENT SYSTEM, MIGHT NOT MIND DEFERRING A UNIFORM COMMUNITY VOTING PROCEDURE BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION UNTIL 1990 OR BEYOND.

5. BRITISH ARE SENSITIVE TO CHARGE THAT THEY ARE BEING OBSTRUCTIVE OF THIS QUESTION, ESPECIALLY IN CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF PERVASIVE CRITICISM IN COMMUNITY OVER CALLAGHAN'S CALL FOR A SEPARATE SEAT AT THE DECEMBER PARIS CONFERENCE. ALL THE SAME, WILSON GOVERNMENT SHOWS NO ENTHUSIASM FOR GOING AHEAD WITH DIRECT ELECTIONS ANY TIME SOON. BRITISH SEE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AS INSTITUTION WITH LITTLE AUTHORITY, AND THEY ARE NOT YET CONVINCED THEY WISH TO GIVE IT MORE -- ESPECIALLY SINCE PASSING OF WESTMINSTER POWER TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL RAISE PROFOUND CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION OF EFFECT OF THAT SHIFT OF AUTHORITY ON THE PRIMACY OF PARLIAMENT. THIS ISSUE WAS FUDGED BY HMG IN REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN AND IT WILL WISH TO DEFER AS LONG AS POSSIBLE POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE NATIONAL DEBATE WHICH COULD UNEARTH REFERENDUM BONES. MOREOVER, UK VIEWS ENTIRE MATTER OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AS TERTIARY TO THEIR ENTRANCE INTO AND COMMITMENT TOWARD EUROPE. THEY ARE MUCH MORE CONCERNED AT THE MOMENT ABOUT PERFORM OF THE CAP, INCREASED EQUITY IN BUDGETARY ALLOCATIONS, AND BETTER CONTROL OVER THE COMMISSION. MORE BROADLY, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT ALTHOUGH BRITAIN DID VOTE DECISIVELY LAST SUMMER TO STAY IN THE COMMUNITY, A NATURAL AND EASY IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CONTINENT -- WHICH WOULD REQUIRE THE END OF CENTURIES OF

ETHNOCENTRISM -- DOES NOT YET EXIST HERE. PEOPLE OF BRITAIN AND THEIR PRESENT LEADERS ARE NOT READY IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO GIVE UP ANY ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE NAME OF EUROPEAN UNITY.

AND FINALLY, AS WILSON CONFRONTS IN THE
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PAGE 03 LONDON 17566 02 OF 02 141535Z

IMMEDIATE YEARS AHEAD CONSUMING PROBLEMS WITH THE ECONOMY, WITH THE UNIONS, WITH DEVOLUTION TO SCOTLAND AND WALES, WITH THE MANAGEMENT OF NORTH SEA OIL, HE MAY WELL WONDER WHAT IS IN IT FOR HIM TO PUSH HARD ON A POTENTIALLY CONTENTIOUS ISSUE WITH FEW, IF ANY, IMMEDIATE PAY OFFS.

6. ON THE BASIS OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S RESERVATIONS, BUT IN THE LIGHT OF ITS WISH NOT TO CONFRONT ITS EC COLLEAGUES, OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT WILSON WILL PROBABLY SING A SUNNY BUT SUBDUED SONG ON DIRECT ELECTIONS AT THE DECEMBER 1-2 EUROPEAN COUNCIL MEETING IN ROME. HE WILL EMPHASIZE BRITAIN'S COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO DIRECT ELECTIONS, BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OBVIOUS NEED FOR A LONG AND DELIBERATE PROCESS OF PUBLIC DEBATE BEFORE THOSE ELECTIONS GO FORWARD. WHETHER OR NOT THE UK FORMALLY LIFTS ITS RESERVE AT ROME -- AND OUR GUESS IS THAT IT WILL NOT -- THIS LABOR GOVERNMENT, AS LONG AS IT IS IN POWER, WILL TAKE THE POSITION ON DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT OF AN INNOCENT NEWLYWED, SURE OF COMMITMENT, SHY OF CONSUMMATION.

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